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The Effects of British Propaganda on the Great Adventure of Colonel Edward M. House from May 1914 to June 1915

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THE EFFECTS OF BRITISH PROPAGANDA ON "THE
GREAT ADVENTURES" OF COLONEL EDWARD M.
HOUSE FROM MAY 1914 TO JUNE 1915

by

James Richard Carney, S.J.

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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LIFE

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CHAPTER I
PLANS FOR CONTROL OF PUBLIC
OPINION IN AMERICA

War! War breaks out! Three times within the last forty years, newspapers carried headlines announcing new wars. Three times, America was not directly involved; three times, she took up arms and sent thousands of men overseas. World War II and Korea are still fresh in our minds. Not so clearly etched in our memories, however, are the historical preludes which marked America's entry into the first World War. In this thesis we will attempt to show how America was swayed toward her eventual participation in World War I.

In 1914 newspaper editors flooded the streets with extras announcing the war in Europe. Strangely enough, reactions in America were strongly isolationist. "The first reaction of the American people to the war was one of revulsion and amazement; the conflict appeared 'senseless', 'utterly without cause'.¹ Coupled with these sentiments was a determination to keep out of any war which did not concern us.

1 H. C. Peterson, Propaganda For War, Norman, Oklahoma, 1939, 169. See Charles C. Tansill, America Goes To War, Boston, 1938, 16-31 for a detailed account of newspaper reports.

This surface calm soon began to be ruffled. The British Government recognized the inertia of the American nation and soon took positive steps to convert it into a pro-British attitude. A new type of government agency was called into being to work on American public opinion-propaganda. Its object was to evoke a whole-hearted espousal of British war ideals, and eventual participation in the war.

Propaganda is a word susceptible of many interpretations. Hilaire Belloc gives us a good general definition when he points out that propaganda is "first, the effort to propagate the conviction of the writer or speaker; second, the use of falsehood by way of exaggeration or suppression, or any other distortion of values in order to recommend unjustly to others what one does believe himself."² Belloc's words will suffice to show us what the general impact of propaganda is intended to be. Beyond that, it envisions more specific results, the stirring up of animosity between a neutral nation and the enemy, and the maintenance of peace and concord between neutral nations and allies.³ In our discussion of propaganda, we will not enter into its morality.⁴

² Hilaire Belloc, "Catholic Propaganda," America, August 13, 1932, XLVII, 442.

³ Harold D. Lasswell, Propaganda Technique in the World War, New York, 1938, 10.

⁴ See Arthur Ponsonby, Falsehood in War-Time, London, 1928, 13-29. Ponsonby writes a scathing indictment against those who use propaganda to drag a nation into war.

From this brief consideration of propaganda's scope, we need not offer arguments to prove its necessity. Sir Edward Grey's personal reaction typified the general British recognition of the need for employing it.

Here was the country--so Sir Edward reasoned--that contained the largest effective white population in the world; that could train armies larger than those of any other nation; that could make the most munitions, build the largest number of battleships and merchant vessels, and raise food in quantities great enough to feed itself and Europe besides. This power, the Foreign Secretary believed, could determine the issue of the war.⁵

If America could be brought into the war as one of the Allies, then the Allies would win. It was essential, then, that an all-out effort be started to secure their aid.

Wellington House, the nerve center of all British propaganda, opened its doors early in September 1914. Aiding and abetting it were many other organizations which were more limited in scope.⁶ From Wellington House poured out literature of all types under the guidance of Sir Charles Masterson (then an ordinary citizen). The true extent of its operations became clear long after the war.

Wellington House was . . . concerned with the production, translation and distribution of books, pamphlets, government publications, speeches and so forth dealing with the war, its origin, its history and all the varied and difficult questions which arose during its development; the production and distribution of special pictorial papers; assisting in placing of articles and interviews designed to influence opinion in the world's newspapers and magazines, especially

⁵ Burton J. Hendrick, The Life and Letters of Walter H. Page, Garden City, New York, I, 366.

⁶ See James Duane Squires, British Propaganda at Home and in the United States From 1914 to 1917, Cambridge, 1935, 17, for a list of these groups.

in America; the wide distribution of pictorial matter, cartoons, pictures and drawings, photographs for insertion in newspapers and periodicals and for exhibition; the production and distribution of cinematograph films; personal correspondence with influential people abroad, especially in America; arrangements for the interchange of visits of distinguished neutrals and representatives of the Allies to this country; the production and distribution of maps, diagrams, posters, lantern slides and lectures, pictures, postcards, and all other possible means of miscellaneous propaganda.⁷

Is it any wonder then, that the American people and government officials were strongly influenced in favor of the British?

Early in the war, German propaganda lost most of its effectiveness. Blunders, lack of tact and finesse, the obviousness of their appeals, all these factors conspired to antagonize the American public rather than attract them.⁸ Atrocity stories more than any other one element contributed to German propaganda's ineffectiveness. Out off from any real source or means of combatting the Bryce report, the Germans had to watch passively as American emotions were inflamed against them. Writing on just this particular phase of propaganda, James F. Archibald makes it clear that forty Americans, among them correspondents, attaches, and diplomats, all of whom were in Berlin during the first years of the war, were not able to authenticate one of the outrages which were attributed to the Germans. He goes on to say that when he sent a

7 Ivor Nicholson, "An Aspect of Official British Wartime Propaganda," Cornhill Magazine, LXX, May, 1931, 594 as quoted in Peterson, Propaganda For War, 17.

8 Squires, British Propaganda, 45.

complete report with this information he was dropped from his job because of "unfairness."⁹ Hand in glove with the German propaganda failures came the legend of German tyranny which was foisted on the American people through the channels of British propaganda previously mentioned. This situation made it more difficult for American government officials and their representatives to see the whole problem in its proper perspective.

In America opinion was slow in forming. During this period public opinion was informed and educated by newspapers, magazines, and the radio. Consequently, the first act of propaganda was the cutting of the cables between the United States and Germany, thus covering us from any other source of news from Germany save that which filtered through the propaganda offices in Wellington House. In those days few newspapers retained European staffs and those foreign correspondents who were active in Europe had their dispatches censored by either the Germans or the British.¹⁰ Here again we have an instance of clear-cut favoritism. Thus papers like the New York Times, the Boston Evening Transcript, the Philadelphia Public Ledger, all showed favoritism toward the Allies. Further west, in cities where there was an influential number of Germans, sharp pro-German editorials raised objections which were quickly quashed by the British-supplied press.

⁹ James F. Archibald, "New Light on Ambassador Dunbar's Recall," Current History, Vol. 35, November, 1931, 211. See also Peterson, Propaganda for War, 69.

¹⁰ Walter Millis, Road to War, America 1914-1917, Boston, 1935, 43.

In addition to these general manifestations of propaganda, there were more specific plans evolved for the benefit of particular Americans. In Wellington House, competent workers scrutinized America's "Who's Who." From this list, a mailing list of over 260,000 names was compiled.¹¹ To the persons on this list was sent all the propaganda literature which was deemed worthwhile. The content of this literature was determined by a careful study of the American Press Resume, a detailed report on American reactions to various types of propaganda.¹² Thus, the British knew exactly what phase of propaganda should be toned down and what should receive further emphasis. To spread this propaganda in America, the British engaged the services of James M. Beck, William Archer, James Bryce, G. K. Chesterton, Conan Doyle among others.¹³ Lecturers were sent to America with the idea of appealing to the intellectual element. Lord Grey in a letter to Theodore Roosevelt informed him that J. M. Barrie and A. E. W. Mason were going to the United States for a series of lectures and that he (Roosevelt) would be given letters of introduction for them by Sir Cecil Spring-Rice. In the same letter he explains the reason for their coming.

Their object is, as I understand, not to make speeches or give lectures, but to meet people, particularly those connected with Universities, and explain the British case as regards this war and our views of the issues involved.¹⁴

11 Squires, British Propaganda, 50, 51.

12 Peterson, Propaganda For War, 23.

13 Ibid., 17.

14 Viscount Grey of Fallodon, Twenty-Five Years (1892-1916), New York, 1925, II, 143.

This particular method of propaganda was eminently important because President Wilson, himself once a college professor, leaned heavily on the opinions expressed by his former colleagues.

Letter writing, too, proved to be a forceful method of spreading British ideas. British officials were encouraged to cultivate American friendships in this way. Lord Grey wrote many letters to Theodore Roosevelt and Colonel House. Although the letters to Colonel House are not as numerous as those written to Roosevelt¹⁵ the deficit is more than made up by the interviews, luncheons and dinners Grey used to make a convert of House. These get-togethers proved to be one of the most fertile ways of indoctrinating Americans with British war ideals.

The British realized the uselessness of making direct appeals to the American people. After noting that Americans did not like to be preached at on the subject of joining the Allies because they considered themselves to be neutral, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice went on to say that, "Two Labor members are over now and are doing a good deal of useful talking in the private line--none public."¹⁶

High on the list of targets for British propaganda was Colonel Edward M. House.¹⁷ House was a man to be reckoned with because he was a close

¹⁵ Ibid., 138.

¹⁶ Stephen Gwynn, The Letters and Friendships of Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, London, 1929, II, 239.

¹⁷ Peterson, Propaganda For War, 29.

friend of the President and his personal representative in Europe during this period. It has been a moot question among historians just how much actual importance should be attached to this friendship, and how much influence House really had with the President. We will attempt to throw some light on this strange friendship, although our main consideration will be Colonel House as a representative of the United States Government and the role he had in the outcome of events. We will note the effect of British propaganda on his actions, and try to show in the light of propaganda principles that Colonel House was completely won over to a policy of actual intervention in the war due, in large part, to the effectiveness of these principles as applied by the British. Therefore we will be considering a very particular and specific aspect of propaganda--the attempt of the British to influence Colonel House to follow their policies and advice, and eventually make him an effective spokesman for their cause.

House's background was essentially political in nature. In Texas, he acted as campaign manager in several gubernatorial elections and was greatly instrumental in bringing about the re-election of Governor Hogg in 1892. In 1894 and 1896 he managed the successful campaigns of Governor Culberson while in 1898 and 1900 he helped to elect Major Joseph D. Sayers Governor. Noteworthy, too, was the friendship he made with William J. Bryan during the winter of 1898-1899. Gaining experience in these state elections, he moved east in 1910.

On November 11, 1911 he met Governor Wilson who was then being mentioned as the next Democratic candidate for president. Thus began a friendship

which would shape many of the events of United States history during World War I. Early in 1912 House, now a firm supporter of Wilson's candidacy, returned to Texas to convince the Texas delegates that the best interests of the country would be served by Wilson. House then succeeded in bringing Bryan into the fold to boom Wilson as Democratic candidate. When Wilson was elected, House came into his own. He nominated men for the cabinet, the Federal Reserve system and Ambassadorial posts.¹⁸ One of his most famous appointees was Walter Hines Page.

This biographical sketch indicates the predominately political background of House. When he was made personal representative of the President, he had no training as a diplomat. His personal convictions on the solution of the threat of war in Europe was not one-sided. He felt that the political unrest took its rise in the animosity between Germany and England.¹⁹ He understood too that "... if England were less intolerant of Germany's aspirations for expansion, good feeling could be brought about between them."²⁰ Unfortunately, his plans for righting the situation were of a general nature, replete with such phraseology as 'good feeling' and 'sympathetic understanding.'²¹ House was of this frame of mind just before he began the "Great Adventure," his attempt to bring the nations of Europe to a peaceful solution

¹⁸ George S. Viereck, The Strangest Friendship in History, New York, 1932, 37-41. Viereck points out the various nominations by House and the close similarity to the President's actual choices.

¹⁹ Seymour, Charles, The Intimate Papers of Colonel House, Boston, 1926, I, 239.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 249, 259, 263, 267.

of their problems.

President Wilson agreed with House completely. His one aim was to see peace in the world. His biographer, Ray Stannard Baker, summarizes his position very clearly.

There is no understanding of Wilson's position in this and in many future decisions without emphasizing his dominating purpose. Deep within him, deeper perhaps than any other aspiration, was the desire to keep America out of war, but to be the instrument for making peace in the conflict then in progress, and beyond that, as he told Dr. Axson, he had vision of a new world order, wherein war should be abolished.²²

And again, "There is still a chance--in his view a large chance--that a peaceful solution of the conflict would be reached."²³ Perhaps it was this last feeling which convinced Wilson that he should send Colonel House overseas since he was occupied with policies at home. Joined with the President's desire for peace was a determination to preserve neutrality. Consequently he determined to observe the rules set down for neutrals in international law. To implement this position, he refused to alter any rules during the progress of the war.²⁴ These general positions would have been sufficient to keep America out of the war if they had been carefully followed.

Of note, too, was the President's tendency to remain aloof when he was coming to an important decision. Scholar that he was, he tried to find

²² Ray Stannard Baker, Woodrow Wilson, Life and Letters, New York, 1927, v, 211, 212.

²³ Ibid., 211, 215.

²⁴ Peterson, Propaganda For War, 189.

answers through his own thinking and in the light of his own ideals.²⁵ Together with this quality, he believed too whole-heartedly that his friends, especially Colonel House, were the mirrors of his own mind and that they expressed perfectly his own views when sent to represent him. For these reasons at least two promising plans for peace occurring during the May 1914-June 1915 period went for naught.

About two months before England actually declared war, Colonel House was eagerly awaiting his first trip overseas to try his hand as peace negotiator. On the other side of the ocean, the English were anxiously scanning continental Europe for the first sign of an outbreak of hostilities. British propaganda had not yet set up its main quarters in Wellington House and was not to do so until the following September. In this setting Colonel House sailed on his voyage as the President's personal representative.

²⁵ Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 15.

CHAPTER II

FIRST GREAT ADVENTURE

When House sailed for England in May 1914, he did so as private American citizen rather than an official representative of the United States. Earlier, the President had given his estimation of House's position. In May, 1913, Wilson said:

Mr. House is my second personality. He is my independent self. His thoughts and mine are one. If I were in his place, I would do just as he suggested. . . . If anyone thinks he is reflecting my opinion by whatever action he takes, they are welcome to the conclusion.¹

Although these words were addressed to a politician who sought to discover if House really represented the President, they may be understood in this situation for they were soon to be borne out in the events to be described. The same aura of indefiniteness surrounds House's powers as a representative of the President. In vain do we look for a document which clearly delineates the extent of House's powers. The Colonel in a letter to Page on May 21, 1914, refers to the "letter I have with me."² Baker, after a diligent search for such a document, concludes that the "letter I have with me" could only refer to a letter which has a reference to "such a friend and spokesman."³ Therefore,

1 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 114.

2 Hendrick, Life and Letters of Page, I, 286.

3 Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 37.

we can justly infer that the President did not intend House to make any far-reaching promises or to entangle the United States in any dubious agreements.

On April 9, 1914, a short while before House sailed, in talking to Mr. Irwin Laughlin, Counsellor of the American Embassy at St. James's, he said, "I went into some detail as to giving Germany a zone of influence in Asia Minor and Persia, and also lending a hope that they might be given a freer hand commercially in the Central and South American republics."⁴ Here, too, is an example of Colonel House's misconception of his role as spokesman.

Against this background, Seymour's evaluation of House's mission seems extraordinary and somewhat mystifying. Speaking of House he says:

Thus Colonel House set forth on his extraordinary mission a private American citizen whose only relevant title was 'personal friend of the President', a single individual hoping to pull the lever of common sense that might divert the nations of the Old World from the track of war to that of peace. To inject himself successfully into the core of the European maelstrom demanded as much courage as diplomatic deftness. These qualities he possessed, as well as a sense of proportion which caused him often to laugh at the stark humor of the odds against him. But the stake for which he played was tremendous. It was the peace of the world. If he failed no harm was done. And if he succeeded--⁵

If the odds were colossal, a diplomat would tread warily. He would make few promises and enter into no agreements unless he had strict instructions. No harm would result if he proved to be only a good listener.⁶

⁴ Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 246.

⁵ Ibid., 247.

⁶ In May 1913 House at the instigation of Tyrell was advised to represent himself as the 'Power behind the throne' in attempting this mission to Berlin. Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 32.

Late in May Colonel House arrived in Berlin. His reaction to Germany can be well summarized in a letter to the President on May 29, 1914, when he remarked, "The situation is extraordinary. It is militarism run stark mad."⁷ It is well to note the antecedents which called for this remark. To point out "a small indication of the atmosphere of militarism which prevailed in the larger aspects of life,"⁸ Hendrick notes that great numbers of Germans were trying to improve their marksmanship by crowding the shooting galleries of Berlin. His information was based on the fact that Colonel House and Mr. Gerard tried to get into one of the galleries but that they were unable to do so because every one of them was filled to capacity.

House spoke to the Kaiser on June 1, 1914. The conversation as recounted in his diary was general in nature.⁹ House told the Kaiser of his commission, "I told him that the President and I thought perhaps an American might be able to better compose the difficulties . . ."¹⁰ He spoke also of the English fear of the Kaiser's navy and powerful army and suggested a reduction of the navy.

Little was actually accomplished during this short visit to Berlin, and so House went to London. While there, he had a series of conversations with members of the British government which mark the first attempts of the

7 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 249.

8 Hendrick, Life and Letters of Page, I, 290.

9 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 253-257.

10 Ibid., 256.

English to win his favor. On June 16, the day before the first of these recorded conversations, the President wrote to House,

You have, I hope and believe, begun a great thing and I rejoice with all my heart. You are doing it, too, in just the right way with your characteristic tact and quietness and I wish you Godspeed in what follows. I could not have done the thing nearly as well.¹¹

Again, there is no mention of specific recommendations.

On June 17 House, at a luncheon with Grey, Tyrell and Page, recounted the story of his stay in Berlin and suggested that a meeting be arranged between the Kaiser, Grey and himself. House laconically remarked that "this was not gone into further."¹² This was the first instance of the employment of delay to stifle any possible attempt to solve some of the larger problems. Each time this tactic was used, it would be suggested by the British, notably by Sir Edward Grey, and agreed to by House. This was the first real example of British propaganda of a highly individual character, an attempt to influence a spokesman of the United States.

On June 22 the President again reiterated his faith in House whom he called, " . . . a friend who so thoroughly understands me to interpret me to those whom it is most important we should inform and enlighten with regard to what we are actually seeking to accomplish."¹³ Still there were no definite

11 Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 39-40.

12 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 260. Entire Letter: 260-2.

13 Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 41.

suggestions by the President on June 26, House blithely proclaims that this plan for "a direct and open" policy is acceptable to Grey and Tyrell with whom he had been dining,¹⁴ a statement which makes one wonder how gullible the Colonel was.

House next proposed a money lending plan to govern monetary matters between America, England, France and Germany. Basically, the plan was directed toward the development of waste lands in backward countries. By its terms investing nations were guaranteed a safe return for money invested, and borrowers were protected from usurious money-lending rates.¹⁵

Again the President was silent about House's proposals. At this point, one begins to wonder if the President took House's words at face value. Baker continually shunts the blame off on Colonel House for the haziness which marked the President's dealings with House,¹⁶ but one cannot help but ask if some of the blame should be leveled at the President. At this date, after commending House for his exchanges of information, Wilson goes on to say, "I hope you are getting a lot of fun and pleasure out of these things, and all my little circle here join me in the warmest messages to both of you."¹⁷ Perhaps

14 Seymour, Intimate Letters, I, 263.

15 Ibid., 264.

16 Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 36, 39, 43.

17 Ibid., 42.

Colonel House's actions without explicit Presidential consent can be explained this way; "If the President did not object, I knew that it was safe to go ahead, for he rarely agreed in words; while if he disagreed, he always expressed himself."¹⁸

From this money lending plan, House hoped to have a meeting of the involved nations with the idea of formulating some peace plan as an offshoot. The plan was an admirable one in that it would have aired some of the pressing difficulties and make the position of both sides clearer. Unfortunately, Grey haggled and delayed, and House did nothing but stand by, content to let the British make the first move.¹⁹ On June 28 Archduke Franz Ferdinand was murdered and the possibility of any negotiations disappeared when the newspapers hit the streets of London.

Before returning to the United States, House wrote a letter to the Kaiser which was pointless in view of the European situation. It called for the Emperor to take some step to alleviate the crisis. It was characterized by Seymour as "a last opportunity given to the Kaiser, who had the assurance of a disinterested outsider, that if Germany sincerely desired peace, she would have the active assistance of the United States and the cooperation of

18 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 265. This point is clearly brought out by Viereck's The Strangest Friendship in History, 16, "The discussions between the two men were remarkable not only for what they said but for what they left unsaid. Silence on Wilson's part meant agreement. Silence on the part of House indicated dissent."

19 Ibid., 271.

Great Britain."²⁰ Perhaps a truer summary of a possible solution to the crisis would have included a more prompt and ready acquiescence of the British to go ahead with the negotiations instead of waiting until something broke.

Thus ended the first "Great Adventure." Sir Edward Grey had successfully withstood the entreaties of House to start negotiations, the first in a long list of conquests by the beguiling Foreign Minister.²¹ Grey himself felt that he had greatly influenced Colonel House, so much so that he said shortly after House's first visit terminated:

House left me in doubt from the first that he held German militarism responsible for the war, . . . It was not necessary to spend much time in putting our case to him. He had a way of saying "I know it" in a tone and manner that carried conviction both of his sympathy with, and understanding of, what was said to him. I felt sure that he did not differ much from Page in his view of the merits of the war; where he differed from Page was in his view of what President Wilson could or ought to try to do.²²

This friendship between House and Grey is an instance of propaganda as understood in the sense noted above.²³ It was to become more emphatic when a determined effort was made to propagandize America in September.

On July 21 House sailed for the United States. His "Great Adventure" accomplished very little. It brought peace no nearer. The President, perhaps because of his preoccupation with domestic legislation and with Mexico took no

20 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 274.

21 Millis, Road to War, 26.

22 Grey, Twenty-Five Years, II, 124-125.

23 Supra, 2, 7, 16.

definite action. Baker notes that it is one of the great "ifs" in history from the President's point of view. If Wilson had acted strongly when House made the first attempt for a peace conference, perhaps war might have been averted.²⁴ Colonel House arrived home only to be involved in another series of diplomatic maneuvers which were to spell further setbacks for the United States.

²⁴ Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 4.

CHAPTER III

JULY 1914 TO JANUARY 1915

HOUSE IN AMERICA

Colonel House debarked in Boston on July 29, and went to his home in Pride's Crossing, Massachusetts. He did not make a personal report of his findings overseas until he visited the President in his summer home at the end of August.

Before considering House's role in an important peace proposition and the Declaration of London, it would be well to note the state of mind of the important figures in our consideration. In August, President Wilson was deeply affected by a personal tragedy - the death of his wife. This had an important bearing on his policies because the President retired from the heavy work of the White House and restricted himself to only the most essential work. Unfortunately, this kept him out of contact with events of the day.¹

On August 18, 1914 Wilson urged neutrality and impartiality as the duty of all true Americans.² On August 19, he said that "The United States must

1 Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 50.

2 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 264.

be neutral in fact as well as in name during these days that are to try men's souls."³ Eleven days later the President is reported as re-echoing a statement which House had previously made to the President "that if Germany won, it would change the course of our civilization and make the United States a military nation."⁴

Apparently, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, British Ambassador in Washington, was certain that the opinion expressed to House by the President was the truer for in a letter to Sir Edward Grey on September 19, he remarked:

I think that there is a wide spread belief (to quote you) that Prussian militarism is the question at issue, and that if it triumphs in Europe, America will have to defend itself. The President said in the most solemn way that if that cause succeeds in the present struggle, the United States would have to give up its present ideals and devote all its energies to defense, which would mean the end of its present system of government. . . . There were tears in his eyes, and I am sure we can, at the right moment, depend on an understanding heart here.⁵

Can we arrive at a true estimation of the President's attitude despite the apparent contradiction mentioned above? Joseph P. Tumulty noted that the President would have espoused the cause of the Belgians if he had not felt that his idea of America's trusteeship of neutrality and international law was of greater moment.⁶ Colonel House recorded the President's evident

3 Peterson, Propaganda For War, 189.

4 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 293.

5 Gwynn, Letters and Friendships of Spring-Rice, II, 223.

6 Joseph P. Tumulty, Woodrow Wilson As I Knew Him, Garden City, New York, 1921, 226.

anti-German leanings after a personal conversation with him;⁷ but Baker is vehement in his denials of any presidential bias.⁸ It would seem, then, that the President gave grounds for suspecting that he was not completely neutral. Subsequent actions within the next few months showed him favoring the British markedly in the "Declaration of London" issue.

Colonel House revealed his thoughts on the matter. From Pride's Crossing on August 22, he wrote,

German success will ultimately mean trouble for us. We will have to abandon the path which you (the President) are blazing as a standard for future generations, with permanent peace as its goal and a new international ethical code as its guiding star, and build up a military machine of vast proportions.⁹

House, discussing with the President a talk on the world situation which he had with Dumba, the Austrian Ambassador, states very illogically that "he (Dumba) forgot to add that England is not exercising her power in an objectionable way, for it (England's navy) is controlled by a democracy."¹⁰ House's analysis of German sentiment is clear cut and leaves no room for doubt.

While these conflicting views and opinions were being uttered, Oscar Straus, engaged in anti-German propaganda, was contacted by Speyer, chief adviser to Count Bernstorff, the German Ambassador, on a possible peace proposal. Then after liason was established between Straus and Bernstorff,

7 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 293.

8 Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 63.

9 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 285.

10 Ibid., 323.

Bernstorff notified Bryan, Jusserand, the French Ambassador, and Spring-Rice. Spring-Rice immediately began discussing the proposal with some of his advisers, among whom was Colonel House, "and received the somewhat shrewd if perhaps treasonable advice 'that we should at once declare that the Allies are anxious for peace with guarantees of permanency.'"¹¹ This approach would forestall any statement that the British were not eager for peace. As Spring-Rice reported to Grey in a letter of September 22, House made his point still clearer when he said that American sympathy might be lost, "if it could be asserted with any show of reason that Germany was willing to make peace, but that the Allies were determined on war at all hazards."¹² Spring-Rice in the same letter went on:

I said also that it had been proved again and again that Germany's main object was to break the solidarity of the Allies, and that this was a possible explanation of Bernstorff's willingness to speak with me.

House said he fully understood, but he thought it a good thing for us and the Allies that we should not adopt a non possumus attitude as to negotiations, and that it could be only to our advantage that Germany should be forced to show her hand.¹³

Here again is an example of collaboration which will serve only to make the chance of following through on the peace proposal slimmer.

While these negotiations were under way, House did not confine his discussion to Spring-Rice alone. He was busily writing to various influential

¹¹ Millis, Road to War, 78, quoting Gwynn, Letters and Friendships of Spring-Rice, II, 223.

¹² Gwynn, Letters and Friendships of Spring Rice, II, 225. See Tansill, America Goes to War, 434-445.

¹³ Ibid., 226.

diplomats.¹⁴ A characteristic of these letters is the desire to delay action, a procedure suggested by Spring-Rice's hope of finding "not only the end of a war but the end of all wars."¹⁵ Thus Colonel House again succumbed to the expressed wishes of the representative of a foreign power at a time when an elusive peace proposal should have been followed out with dispatch. With such sweeping statements such as a peace to end all wars, Spring-Rice effectively stymied any attempts for a speedy consideration of the peace proposal. Berlin and London hedged further and House waited. The negotiations dragged on spasmodically until December when they were finally abandoned. In all these negotiations, the propaganda strategem of delay proved valuable in furthering British plans and the peace proposal was dropped. Hope still remained that House could do something positive toward a peace conference if he went overseas. It was this hope that prompted the "Second Great Adventure."

During the course of these negotiations, one small voice was heard which, if listened to, might have injected a note of realism into the procedure - that of Bryan. Page was writing about the "Peace Old-Women,"¹⁶ and Hendirck was commenting about Bryan as an "ultra-pacifist" and one for whom "it was more important that the war should be stopped than that the Allies should win."¹⁷ Bryan actually was making plans which would become part and

¹⁴ Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 321 - Zimmermann; I, 323 - Dumba; I, 325 - Bernstorff; I, 326 - Spring-Rice.

¹⁵ Ibid., 326.

¹⁶ Ibid., 333.

¹⁷ Hendrick, Life and Letters of Page, I, 400.

parcel of the tenth article of the League of Nations.¹⁸

Late in September, Wellington House was officially but secretly organized. Extreme care was taken to avoid all reference to its existence. Even among members of the House of Commons, conflicting rumors were bandied about concerning the activities of Charles Masterson. Each query about Wellington House or its director, Masterson, was "met by dextrous evasions or by forthright refusal to answer."¹⁹ Lord Grey made no reference to Wellington House or his connection with it in his autobiography. Notable, too, was the absence of any discussion of the many negotiations between Colonel House and British leaders. The reason adduced for this silence is interesting, "Since no mention of this was made on the American side either, its omission cannot be considered as a dereliction of Wellington House."²⁰ This secrecy about Wellington House was absolutely necessary if its operations were to succeed. But for historians trying to gauge its effectiveness, it poses the difficulty of trying to connect action on the part of one who is the object of propaganda activities, in our case Colonel House, with the operations of those who are representatives of Wellington House. This connection will be made in this study by showing the effects which individual Britons had on Colonel House, and by indicating that these effects were directly responsible for pro-British decisions of House. This approach takes us far beyond the ordinary range of

18 Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 286, note 2.

19 Squires, British Propaganda, 29.

20 Squires, British Propaganda, 70.

propaganda which is usually directed at a large group. From this point in our consideration, we will be noting just how this individual propaganda succeeded after British propaganda devices were ordered and channeled by this new organization.

Early in the war, it was necessary for all the contesting parties to agree on some proposals in addition to the already existing international law as a basis for solving maritime problems.²¹ The United States wanted to ascribe to the conclusions reached in the London Conference of 1909, embodied in a draft of resolutions called the Declaration of London. In summary, the Declaration provided for: a limitation of exorbitant contraband lists, a guarantee of clearance for vessels with munitions of war, a promise not to form a competing-government-owned merchant marine and a refusal of permission for armed British ships to enter American ports. It also states that the United States would no longer be a munitions market for just a single nation, Britain. This last point was included primarily because British restrictions and the consequent restraint of neutral shipping cut off neutral trade to Holland and the Scandinavian countries.²² Germany and France had agreed and had already included most of the decisions reached at the Conference in their prize codes. The British, however, refused to consider any possibility of recognition because the Declaration was too favorable to neutrals. Instead of

21 For further data concerning the Declaration of London, we are using as a basis Edwin Borchard and William Potter Lage, Neutrality for the U.S., New Haven, 1940, especially pages 59-65.

22 Borchard and Lage, Neutrality, 60.

falling back on international law which both Great Britain and the United States agreed on, an attempt was made to push through the Declaration of London in September-October 1914.

On September 26, the State Department prepared a list of the legal rights of all neutrals and of the violations of these rights by the British.²³ This list was sent to the President for his signature. Colonel House arrived in Washington on the 27th and went into conference with the President about it. House's immediate reaction to the list was - "exceedingly undiplomatic."²⁴ When the Colonel suggested that he could iron out the difficulties in a conference with Spring-Rice, Wilson agreed. At this juncture we must note that the object of British diplomacy "was to secure the maximum of blockade that could be enforced without a rupture with the United States."²⁵ Colonel House took care to avoid that rupture when he conferred with Spring-Rice. House writes of this meeting.

We outlined a dispatch for this Government to send to Page, and then we outlined the dispatch which we thought he should send Sir Edward Grey. We agreed to be absolutely frank with one another letting each know just what was being done, so there could be no subterfuge or misunderstanding.²⁶

23 Cf. Borchard and Lage, Neutrality for a list of the violations through various British decrees, 61.

24 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 307.

25 Grey, Twenty-Five Years, II, 107.

26 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 308.

Seymour's comment is enigmatical for one who is an historian of note:

It would be difficult to find in all history another instance of diplomacy so unconventional and so effective. Colonel House, a private citizen, spreads all the cards on the table and consults with the Ambassador and the Foreign Minister of that power. If there is criticism of the method, it is stifled by its success.²⁷

While Seymour's comments on the unconventionality and effectiveness of the diplomacy of Colonel House, we might reflect on the report of Spring-Rice to Grey on the final draft of the message. After saying how catastrophic the original note would have been to the British plans, he closes his letter, "It was arranged that instead of the dispatch a telegram should be sent giving the general outline for a friendly discussion."²⁸

Thus what was to have been a statement of the specific rights of the United States to be included in international law was watered down through the efforts of one of our own diplomats to an innocuous, general telegram. House explained his stand, "As it was, they (the British) had already published their intention of doing the things to which our Government objected, and it would be difficult to handle it now in a way to save the amour-propre of his (Grey's) government."²⁹ That statement shows the tremendous influence exercised by the British on Colonel House, an influence so great that it brought about a change in the policy of the United States government and saw a

27 Ibid.

28 Gwynn, Letters and Friendships of Spring-Rice, II, 233. For the contents of the telegram, cf. Borchard and Lage, Neutrality For the U.S., 64. The telegram is referred to as "a record low for American diplomacy. . . . The 'champion' of neutrals had become a strange figure of feebleness and subserviency."

29 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 308.

representative of the United States worrying more about the amour-propre of England than about the wishes of his own State department. Of all the propaganda victories won over Colonel House, this is perhaps the most outstanding.

Seymour explains this action:

It was inevitable that the Allies, under British leadership because of the strength of the British navy, should seize and search neutral vessels which might carry contraband; it was equally certain that they would extend the definition of contraband.³⁰

Neither of these conclusions would have been certain or inevitable if America, in the person of her representatives, had asserted her rights as a neutral, and had forced a signing of the Declaration of London once her neutral rights had been made clear.

Thus did an American diplomat confer with the British Ambassador and help to debilitate the valid legal positions of his own government, so as to conform with the views of the offending government.³¹

This episode did not mark the end of attempts by the United States to make the Declaration part of the body of international law. Shortly after, Colonel House was trying to convince the President to move slowly, and to let matters take their own course. House, however, did fear that Bryan might step into the picture and so something about the note-changing affair.³² Quite probably the President was at fault for not taking a more decisive part in the whole

30 Ibid., 303.

31 Borchard and Lage, Neutrality, 63-64. See also Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 207, note 3.

32 Hendrick, Life and Letters of Page, I, 413.

procedure. The Colonel mentioned the President's reticence and noted that he did not show enough interest in European affairs because he was involved with problems at home.³³ However, if the original draft of the note was a justified statement of the American position, and we have every reason to believe that it was judging from its contents, then Wilson should have asserted his position and not let a subordinate fritter away such a valuable opportunity for asserting the rights of the United States.

During the September-October 1914 period, Walter Hines Page, the American Ambassador at the Court of St. James, was showing himself to be of a like mind as House, if not more vigorous. Page allowed himself free rein in his criticism of this part of United States foreign policy, so much so that he drew a rebuke from the President, "Beg that you will not regard the position of this government as merely academic."³⁴

All attempts to bring about the acceptance of the Declaration of London ceased with the publication of a Lansing memorandum which yielded before the obstacles placed in the way of its passage by Britain, and gave as a reason for surrender an understanding and appreciation of the British position.³⁵ Page rationalized on the worthwhileness of this decision and added a threat to back up his stand, "If Lansing brings us the Declaration of London - after four flat and reasonable rejections - I shall resign. I will not be the

33 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 296.

34 Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 216. See also Borchard and Lage, Neutrality, 67 for an instance of Page's misinterpretation of our foreign policy.

35 Borchard and Lage, Neutrality, 75.

instrument of a perfectly gratuitous and ineffective insult to this patient and fair and kindly government."³⁶ Page drew a second censure from the President for this statement on October 23.³⁷ Colonel House couched his approval in less forceful but nevertheless meaningful words on October 29, "I cannot see how there can be any serious trouble between England and America, with all of us feeling as we do; but of course we must needs be careful in the manner of doing certain things."³⁸

What did America lose by backing down on the note explaining her neutral rights, and then on the Declaration of London? Our initial plan in seeking its passage was to protect ourselves as neutrals against further depredations on our maritime vessels by the British. By yielding, we lost the legal standing on which we could base our complaints for seizures of vessels, or the addition of further materials to an already large contraband list. Further, our foreign trade "might be made to wait upon the military necessities of foreign powers."³⁹ Above all, we lost the initiative on the diplomatic front. The United States had all the trump cards because we alone could supply the munitions to keep the Allied war effort going. With the threat of a withdrawal of these munitions, we could have guaranteed passage of the Declaration of London, but unfortunately, our own representative, Colonel House, took the

36 Hendrick, Life and Letters of Page, I, 383, 384.

37 Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 218.

38 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 309.

39 Millis, Road To War, 89.

teeth from our demands when he watered down the State Department note. Our entire conduct added up to a singular diplomatic defeat from which we never recovered.

Repercussions to this decision were not slow in coming. Failure to pass a guarantee for clearance of merchant vessels, as provided in the Declaration, gave the British the opportunity to perpetrate further departures from international law. On October 29 by an Order in Council most cargoes to Northern neutrals were made confiscable if the shipper could not prove that they would not reach Germany.⁴⁰ Further assurances that United States merchantmen would suffer at the hands of the British were given by Spring-Rice when he wrote to a confrere in the British diplomatic corps, "We cannot give up the right to exert pressure on Germany by stopping her trade in some articles at any rate. The Americans seem to have a sort of idea that their ships are or ought to be sacrosanct. This we can't admit."⁴¹ To the fear that the United States might threaten an arms embargo, Spring-Rice had a ready answer:

If there is any chance of the Administration agreeing to such a measure as the prohibition of the sale of arms and ammunition, it will become necessary to point out that such un-neutral action would disqualify the government from the office of an impartial mediator.⁴²

⁴⁰ Borchard and Lage, Neutrality, 78.

⁴¹ Gwynn, Letters and Friendships of Spring-Rice, II, 242.

⁴² Gwynn, Letters and Friendships of Spring-Rice, II, 247.

Spring-Rice knew that this was the perfect answer because of the President's deep-rooted desire to act in the role of mediator, and because he could be sure that men like House and Page would strongly oppose such a measure. Spring-Rice's record as an Ambassador might be worthy of study to gain a true idea of British diplomatic success on this side of the ocean. According to Gwynn, Spring-Rice never met with a reversal during the entire period when America was neutral.⁴³ Without attempting to question his ability as a diplomat, we might note that the calibre of the men who represented America made his task easier.

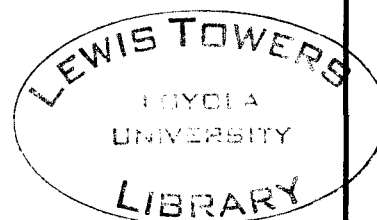
In December 1914, House picked up again the idea of a peace conference on foreign shores. Late in the month, he heard from Herr Zimmermann, German Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, who in a letter agreed to House's proposal for a meeting.⁴⁴ Bernstorff, however, maintained that he had no power to consent to House's plan. When the British demurred, the President and House decided to let the plan go for the time being until "I (House) had heard something from the Allies."⁴⁵ Perhaps, more prodding by the President and House would have hastened the proposed talks, but they waited. Apparently, the idea of a foreign conference would have to be shelved.

Another crisis, however, took place which again suggested the idea of joint peace meetings. A note from Wilson and the Department of State was

⁴³ Ibid., 430-431.

⁴⁴ Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 339.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 343.



forwarded to London on December 26. It stated that:

the present policy of His Majesty's Government toward neutral ships exceeds the manifest necessity of a belligerent and constitutes restrictions on the rights of American citizens on the high seas which are not justified by the rules of international law or required under the principle of self-preservation.⁴⁶

Still another note protesting the overbearing control of neutral commerce was delivered, but it was robbed of its effectiveness by allowing that the British could act if there was "manifestly an imperative necessity to protect their (Allied) national safety."⁴⁷ These notes, together with a letter from Grey critical of the foreign policy of the United States,⁴⁸ convinced House that a trip overseas was necessary. House set out to get Wilson's approval.

News of the proposed venture reached the ears of Bryan. Bryan had criticized the obvious avoidance of the State Department by House when he had conducted negotiations of nation policy before. In the Intimate Papers, there are no letters reported as being exchanged between Bryan and House, a strange omission considering that Bryan was Secretary of State, and House a representative of the President in affairs of state. Bryan is mentioned once in passing as being in agreement with the proposed trip.⁴⁹ How could the Colonel conduct talks in foreign capitals without first hand information from the

⁴⁶ Ray Stannard Baker and William E. Dodd, The New Democracy, Presidential Messages, Addresses, and other Papers, (1913-1917) by Woodrow Wilson, New York, I, 231.

⁴⁷ Borchard and Lage, Neutrality, 34. Cf. Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 232 for exegesis of note.

⁴⁸ Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 347.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 352.

State Department. It was this situation which prompted J. C. Long to comment, "Hardly a week went by now without Bryan being forced to wonder whether he or Colonel House was Secretary of State."⁵⁰

On January 12, 1915, House met the President to discuss the trip. At this meeting House said that "we had exactly twelve minutes conversation before dinner, and during those twelve minutes it was decided that I should go to Europe on January 30."⁵¹ After this dinner, the President read some sketches of prominent men. The following morning, House and the President took breakfast together but nothing was said about instructions for conducting the conferences. "It is just another of the several instances which leave one wondering just how seriously the President took his unofficial ambassador."⁵²

January 13, 1915 found House paying a visit to Bryan. House told him of the trip and that he had spent the day converant with representatives of other nations on the possibilities of peace. Bryan was stunned and wondered why he had not been at least consulted about the peace terms and general trend of the negotiations. He questioned the choice in view of House's obvious lack of experience while he could boast of having thirty completed treaties on his record.⁵³ Even at this last meeting with Bryan House sought no advice on general policy from the Secretary of State.

50 J. C. Long, Bryan, the Great Commoner, New York, 1928, 325.

51 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 350.

52 Millis, Road to War, 128.

53 Long, Bryan, 326.

House saw the President once more on January 24 before he sailed on the Lusitania. In a conversation which lasted for an hour, House told the President what he intended to say to Grey and the Germans. Wilson, giving his approval, replied, "There is not much for us to talk over, for the reason we are both of the same mind and it is not necessary for me to go into details with you."⁵⁴ Again, we have an instance of the vagueness which marked the relationship of House and Wilson. This was the last meeting of the two before House sailed for Europe.

What, then, was the situation at the end of the period from July 1914-January 1915? The possibility for the exchange of peace proposals had been lost when Wilson and House delayed action while waiting for word from London and Berlin. A show of force at the time might have brought lasting results, but Colonel House quashed whatever possibility there was for a straightforward and forceful declaration of our neutral rights when he and Spring-Rice reworded the State Department note to be sent overseas. These losses are traceable to the influence of the British on Colonel House, but they are not due solely to that factor.

More apparent now was the basic error of the friendship of the President and House,

In the whole matter of peace efforts, Wilson was trusting House implicitly without any clear-cut understanding as to how House proposed to act or what his reasons were for supposing that it was the right way to act. He felt that House's mind worked just as his own did and that under given circumstances his friend would act exactly

⁵⁴ Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 346.

as he would wish him to. This was a fatal mistake in Wilson's policy; his trust in House prevented him from seeing things House did not see but which he might himself have seen if he had looked for himself, without House in the way.⁵⁵

The entire blame for our diplomatic losses cannot be ascribed to the Colonel. Contrary to what Baker would have us believe, the fundamental error lay in the President's handing over to House the management of foreign policy. That was something only the President could do, and it is not a failing attributable to House. Once this is granted, then, and only then, can we find fault with the Colonel. In addition, both the President and House suffered from an inability to envisage concrete results. Millis's criticism, although somewhat strong, expresses this notion well,

The President did nothing. Colonel House did worse than nothing. It was not upon the pressing practical issues of the war that the Colonel's eyes were fastened but upon the remoter glories of peace. If the State Department failed to see the wood for the trees, the Colonel even more lamentably failed to see the trees for the wood - and the Colonel was to prove but an indifferent woodsman.⁵⁶

These preoccupations with peace led the President to slant his actions toward the British cause, an attitude that was a product of well-directed propaganda which emphasized his role as a peacemaker in world affairs.⁵⁷

From this survey, we can observe that the balance was being swung over to the Allies slowly but surely. The American people were ignorant of most of the end products which would come from our defeats in the diplomatic field, and they were still very strong for peace. At this juncture, only

55 Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 306, 307.

56 Millis, Road to War, 138.

57 Peterson, Propaganda For War, 208.

their leaders were getting the brunt of British propaganda efforts, although the people would become more conscious of propaganda as time went by.

CHAPTER IV

THE SECOND GREAT ADVENTURE

Colonel House left for Europe on the illfated Lusitania on January 30, 1915. He did not show the same confidence in this second undertaking as he had in the first.¹ His misgivings were well grounded for, shortly before the Lusitania reached English shores, a torpedo scare caused the Captain to run up the American flag. After stating in his diary for February 5 that the flag was raised, House reported that, "Fortunately, I was not an eye-witness to it and have been able to say that I only knew it from heresay."² House's casual approach to the misuse of the American flag was a good indication of his feelings toward the British.

As he crossed the ocean, House read over the letter of President Wilson dated January 29 which was to be the basis for his diplomatic mission in Europe. This letter of credentials is extremely important if we are to view the actions of Colonel House in their proper setting. The most pertinent section of the letter reads as follows:

1 Seymour, Intimate Papers I, 359.

2 Ibid., 361.

It is altogether right and fortunate that you are to act only as my private friend and spokesman, without official standing or authority; for that will relieve both you and those with whom you confer of any embarrassment. Your conferences will not represent the effort of any government to urge action upon another government, but only the effort of a disinterested friend whose suggestions and offers of service will not be misunderstood and may be made use of to the advantage of the world.³

After reaffirming the informal nature of the commission, the letter goes on,

Please say, therefore, very clearly to all with whom you may confer that we have no thought of suggesting whether now or at any other time, the terms and conditions of peace, except as we may be asked to do so as the spokesman of those whose fortunes are involved in the war. Our single object is to be serviceable, if we may, in bringing about the preliminary willingness to parley which must be the first step towards discussing and determining the conditions of peace.⁴

House, then is to attempt no pacts with foreign nations. He is only to make "suggestions and offers of service." In addition, he is not to suggest "terms and conditions" unless he is asked to do so. We shall see that House went against these instructions by proposing a complete plan of his own which he called "Freedom of Seas."

February was a crowded month for the Colonel mainly because it was taken up with consultation with Sir Edward Grey and Sir William Tyrell. Two days after his arrival, the Colonel conferred with Sir Edward Grey. During the conference, as it was reported in a letter to the President dated February 9, House suggested a general conference between belligerents and neutrals to iron out neutrality difficulties. "He (Grey) did not accept this as our full duty, but we passed on to other things."⁵ Thus, Grey easily diverted House

3 Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 303.

4 Ibid.

5 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 364.

from one of the main purposes of his visit, a consideration of neutrality. It marked but the first of a series of evasions by British diplomats to which House would succumb.

The famous note about strict accountability sent by Wilson on February 10, 1915 to Britain and Germany did not have an important place in House's thinking because all his thoughts were directed toward a possible peace plan. He referred to the note as a complication of his mission.⁶ The next few days were occupied with further discussion with Grey, Tyrell and Page. It was at one of these meetings that Tyrell suggested a new covenant which would have all nations grant absolute freedom to all merchantmen in time of war; and Tyrell went on to say that Great Britain recognized

that the submarine had changed the status of maritime warfare and in the future Great Britain would be better protected by such a policy that she has been in the past by maintaining an overwhelming navy.⁷

Tyrell's statement marked the beginning of House's future plan for freedom of the seas which was later to be bitterly opposed by the British.

House in this same meeting concurred with the words of Delcasse, French Minister of Foreign Affairs, which were reported by Grey, "the Allies have not achieved sufficient military success to begin negotiations."⁸ Did House's agreement infer that he would never begin negotiations until the Germans had their backs to the wall? Subsequent actions by House seemed to

⁶ *Ibid.*, 367. See Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 248-252 for a proof of the importance of the note in the President's plans.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 370.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 368.

prove just that. On February 12, House received the long awaited invitation to Germany. After a conference with Grey, House deferred his departure because the British planned to send troops to Greece to offset a plan of envelopment by Germany in the Balkans. The Colonel was advised to wait and he did.⁹ With this delay "there began an adroit series of arguments and efforts on the part of the British to delay his departure."¹⁰

Ambassador Gerard in a letter to House on February 15 put the necessity of quick action succinctly,

Germany will make no peace proposals, but I am sure if a reasonable peace is proposed now (a matter of days, even hours), it would be accepted. (this on my own authority.)

... But, as I told you, this peace matter is a question almost of hours. The submarine blockade once begun, a feeling will come about which may make it impossible until after another phase of the war. If you can get an intimation from the Allies and then come here, it will go, to the best of my belief. I do not think the Kaiser ever actually wanted the war.¹¹

And yet on the same day House was writing to the President with vague suggestions about a peace conference in August and stating that the Germans did not want to have a peace conference even though he had received an invitation to Berlin on February 4 in addition to the prompting by Gerard.¹² Despite Zimmermann's invitation, which House answered a full two weeks later, and

9 Ibid., 373.

10 Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 310.

11 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 376, 377.

12 Ibid., 374.

Gerard's warning, Seymour notes that "as a result of his conference with Grey and Asquith, House decided that the trip to Germany should be postponed, at least for a few weeks."¹³

On February 20 the President found it necessary to rebuke House for his pro-British leaning, a certain proof of the effectiveness of British efforts to win him over. There is no reference in the Intimate Papers either to the dispatch of House to which the President refers, or the letter which Wilson sent. The President wrote:

Your dispatch of the 17th received. It will of course occur to you that you cannot go too far in allowing the English Government to determine when it is best to go to Germany because they naturally desire to await some time when they have the advantage because of events in the field or elsewhere.

If the impression were to be created in Berlin that you were to come only when the British government thought it the opportune time for you to come, you might be regarded when you reached there as their spokesman rather than mine.¹⁴

House's answer to the President explained his delay as being due to the refusal of the French and Russians to consider any peace conferences now while the Germans had the upper hand, but he had no real answer to the objection of the President concerning his tendency to follow the lead of British diplomats.¹⁵

Meanwhile valuable time slipped quickly by. A further round of discussions and talks followed. Lady Paget, Sidney Brooks, and Lord Bryce were among the people House spoke to during the latter half of February. Per-

¹³ Ibid., 375.

¹⁴ Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 313.

¹⁵ Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 380, 381, 382, 383, for House's return letter to the President.

haps the degree of complacency reached by the British diplomats at this time can be judged from the attitude of Spring-Rice when he wrote to Grey about a pointed reference made by Bryan to the British disregard for the law of nations. Spring-Rice was amazed that Bryan should include the British and Germans in the same category as offenders. Bryan seemed to be "rather hurt at my remark that a deep and painful impression would be caused in England by his simultaneous remonstrances in Berlin and London, as if we were equally guilty with the Germans."¹⁶ If this letter is a true indication of their regard for our diplomats and the government they represented, then it is not strange that they would feel free to suggest every possible means to our diplomats at home and abroad to implement their plans.

An interview with the King showed exactly what true British feeling was toward the peace efforts of House. House expressed the King's sentiments in a letter to the President, March 1, 1915. "His (the King's) idea seemed to be that the best way to obtain permanent peace was to knock all the fight out of the Germans, and stamp on them for a while until they wanted peace and more of it than any other nation."¹⁷ This statement should have revealed to House that he was wasting time in England in waiting for an authentic peace offer. Certainly it should have given him some doubts about the real, as opposed to the expressed, plans of the British.

16 Gwynn, Letters and Friendships of Spring-Rice, II, 256.

17 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 385.

Apparently, House's dreams for peace knew no bounds. On March 5, in a letter to Mr. Gordon Auchinloss, the Colonel suggested that there would be no further difficulty with the size of Germany's and France's armies or of Britain's navy, if all the important nations of the world agreed to stop all manufacturing of munitions for a ten year period.¹⁸ Such a plan, while laudable in itself, shows House's lack of contact with the European situation, for the nations of Europe had been stockpiling supplies and munitions with an eye to such a struggle as World War I. A suggestion that they stop further manufacturing war supplies would have been met with derision and scorn.

Finally, "Grey and House had decided that the moment had arrived for the Colonel to go to Berlin."¹⁹ Perhaps House was prodded into suggesting such a step by a letter from Zimmermann dated March 2. Zimmermann, by indicating that House desired to wait until Germany had suffered a reversal before making a definite motion for a peace plan, merely verified the President's fear that House's partisanship was becoming apparent in foreign capitals. Zimmermann declared that "it seems to me, however, that you are taking as a basis a more or less defeated Germany or one nearly at the end of her resources. It is hardly necessary to show in how far this is not the case."²⁰

18 Ibid., 338.

19 Ibid., 390.

20 Ibid., 391.

Gerard wrote again to urge House to come to Germany.

Over a month had passed since House arrived in London, and still another three weeks slipped by before he finally arrived in Berlin. During that time House kept in step with British plans for delay. He was "completely dominated, just as Page was, by British diplomacy, by the sheer persuasiveness and charm of the British statesman at his best - a best that is without equal in this world."²¹ This month and a half is perhaps the most telling proof of British propaganda and its effect on Colonel House. We defined propaganda as a "distortion of values in order to recommend unjustly to others what one does believe himself."²² Grey, as spokesman for the British and the Allies, believed that peace could or should not be attained for reasons already mentioned. His task, then, was to prevent a representative of the United States on a peace mission, in this case Colonel House, from making any real progress towards peace. We have already shown at length how successful he was in deterring the Colonel. In so doing, he managed to gain the other and more important end of propaganda, "the maintenance of peace and concord between neutral nations and allies."²³ During the year 1914-1915, no real break in diplomatic relations occurred, a fact which was a fitting tribute to his success.

21 Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 315.

22 Supra, 2.

23 Ibid.

House left for Berlin by way of Paris on March 11. He was encouraged when Delcasse agreed to accept the President as a mediator, but the French Foreign Minister gave no indication what French terms for peace would be. Phrases such as "noble desire to bring about peace,"²⁴ and "good will of the President"²⁵ characterized House's brief sojourn in the French capital, but there were no concrete proposals by the French.

On March 20, Colonel House met Zimmermann in Berlin to exchange notes. In reporting the interview to the President, House stated that England did not desire Germany crushed and that, in the final analysis, terms would have to be agreed upon between these two countries. This is so patent that I wonder they do not recognize it."²⁶ In this report to Wilson, House expressed a doubt that his mission would ever be successful because both the English and the Germans have been led to expect too much by way of concessions by their enemies. Despite that feeling House hoped that he had put relations between the United States and Germany on a "good footing."²⁷

As in London, House continued his practice of meeting those who might have a bearing on a possible peace proposal. Among those whom he visited were Dr. Rathenau, an important figure in post-war Germany, von Gwinner, a banker, and the Foreign Minister, von Jagow.

24 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 396.

25 Ibid., 397.

26 Ibid., 400-401. Perhaps it was not so patent to the Germans because of such statements as the King's. Cf. supra, 44.

27 Ibid., 401.

One should expect that House would make an attempt to see the Emperor since he alone could give the Colonel specific details of Germany's demands for peace. Gerard explained to House that he did not have an audience with the Emperor for months "because of his intense feeling against us on account of our shipment of munitions of war to the Allies."²⁸ The Colonel went on to note why he did not see the Emperor, "It is not important now whether I see him or not, and I shall leave it to Zimmermann's judgment."²⁹ If House did not see the Emperor, what could he hope to accomplish? That tendency to let someone else take the initiative again again brought failure to House for he never did get to see the Emperor during his stay in Germany.

Seymour has a long description of House's "Freedom of the Seas" plan just before he left Germany. In it we find an analysis of the problem of neutrality, a topic in which House did not show much interest up to this point. No mention of the details of the plan had been made to the President despite the President's warning not to propose such plans without consultation, and for this reason the plan seems to be one attributable to House's own endeavours, although prompted by a conversation with Sir William Tyrrell.³⁰

House's biographer first outlines the problems connected with neutrality. As Seymour notes, the two major problems centered on Germany's

28 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 402.

29 Ibid.

30 Supra, 41.

attempt to stop the flow of supplies to the Allies, and Britain's desire to extend the contraband lists to stop war goods from reaching Germany.³¹

House's solution to these knotty problems was good. It is summarized by Seymour in these words:

What House proposed was that the contraband list should be restricted so as to include only actual implements of warfare; everything else should be placed upon the free list. The trade of merchant vessels, whether belligerent or neutral, should be allowed to proceed freely outside territorial waters so long as they carried no contraband. They might even enter any belligerent port without hindrance, unless that port were actually and effectively blockaded by the enemy's fleet.³²

Seymour adds further details of House's plan in the Colonel's words:

The private property of all private citizens or subjects of signatory Powers (so ran his instructions), with the exception of contraband of war, shall be exempt from capture or seizure on the high seas or elsewhere by the armed vessels or by the military forces of any of the said signatory Powers, but nothing herein contained shall extend exemption from seizure of vessels or their cargoes which may attempt to enter a port blockaded by the naval forces of any of the said Powers.³³

On closer scrutiny of House's recommendations, we find that he has merely reworded the prescriptions of the Declaration of London, and has added one refinement, immunity of private property at sea, an idea which is also implicitly contained in the Declaration.³⁴ Thus, we see House suggesting a

31 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 405.

32 Ibid., 406.

33 Ibid., 407-408.

34 Supra, 27.

"Freedom of the Seas" plan, the basic elements of which he himself had put beyond all possibility of attainment because of his part in the note exchange with Spring-Rice. He suggests a further addition to the principles of the Declaration of London, namely, the immunity of private property at sea, even though the British diplomats had refused to accept these same principles the previous October 1914. Now, then, could House hope to secure their acceptance now when he had added a further clarifying principle? And so, another grandiose peace plan became merely a subject for polite discussion between House and various foreign diplomats in London and Paris. It never gained favor, primarily because its essential ideas had been flatly rejected not four months before.

This analysis of House's plan differs widely from that of his biographer who states that the Germans "lost no time in advertising the idea as their own and thereby immediately ruined all chance of success."³⁵ Consequently, since the English had not heard of the plan before, and because the plan presumably took its origin in Germany, the English would have no part of it. Would it not have been wiser for House not to present the plan at all unless he had diplomatic representatives of Germany and England on hand to consider it as a formal proposal provided, of course, that he received permission for offering it as a solution from the President? When a treaty or a peace plan concerns more than one nation, it is a sound diplomatic policy to present the plan or treaty to all parties concerned so as not to vitiate its effectiveness.

35 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 411.

This last attempt marked the end of House's second mission to Germany. Of the two ventures, this was the more fruitless. Not even the most meager peace proposals were considered in detail. No common ground was established for a future agreement. On April 2, House left Berlin for Paris.

The next three and a half weeks were spent in Paris, where "House did not raise the question of peace, for there was less chance of it than ever."³⁶ House met Poincare, the French President, and Delcasse for a few interviews, but peace plans did not enter in the conversations. Later in his visit, House gave the reasons for his silence about peace. He reported that Wilson was not in favor over here, because the impression has been spread that he lacks sympathy for the Allies and that his true pro-German feelings are being manifested in these peace proposals.³⁷ House had a perfect answer to that rumor, but he gave no indication that he offered it. He could have pointed to the heavy loans made to the Allies which, at the end of the period of neutrality, totaled \$1,900,000,000.³⁸ The long streams of merchantmen coming from the United States to France and Great Britain, their hatches covering holds crammed with munitions and arms should have dispelled the idea of any Presidential bias towards the Allies.

While in Paris, House corresponded briefly with Grey on his "Freedom of the Seas" plan. We have only two letters on the subject in the Intimate Papers the second of which, from Grey to House, put a final quietus on future

³⁶ Ibid., 415.

³⁷ Ibid., 417.

³⁸ Samuel Flagg Bemis, A Diplomatic History of the United States, New York, 1947, 592.

House efforts to put his plan into effect. Grey wrote:

As to 'freedom of the seas,' if Germany means that her commerce is to go free upon the sea in time of war, while she remains free to make war upon other nations at will, it is not a fair proposition.

If, on the other hand, Germany would enter after this war, some League of Nations. . ."³⁹

Grey's hypothesis about German freedom on the seas during war-time is a complete derangement of the plan proposed by House. The Colonel offered a guarantee for private property on the high seas while still allowing the belligerents to sink or confiscate ships carrying contraband. The phrase "after the war" delineates Grey's position clearly. He would be very interested in this proposal after the war but not before Germany had been beaten. He had shown this line of thought before when he refused to pass on the Declaration of London.

Despite the fact that Grey had once refused to consider his plan, House took it up again with him when he returned to London on April 28. In reading the account of this attempt, we notice that Seymour has switched the status quaestionis from a consideration of a "Freedom of the Seas" plan governing the war being fought then to a detailed report of how it would be suggested at a Peace Conference after the war,⁴⁰ a fact which had been suggested in Grey's letter. Apparently, House's biographer recognized that House had failed as a peace mediator whose office it was to effect some

³⁹ Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 425. Underscorings my own.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 426.

cessation of hostilities here and now. This change to a post-bellum peace conference sounded the death-knell for "Freedom of the Seas." The coffin was nailed tighter by the sinking of the Lusitania.

During Colonel House's visits to Germany and France, we cannot point to any direct action of British propaganda upon him, for he did not have Grey or Tyrell counselling him, but their influence was strongly felt because the delay in House's departure, which was directly traceable to them, reduced House's efficacy as a peace mediator. Both Tyrell and Grey accomplished their aim, a delay in peace negotiations, for when House returned to London, he had nothing to show for his efforts.

CHAPTER V
HOUSE AND THE SINKING
OF THE LUSITANIA

On May 7 while dining in the American Embassy, House saw the despatch which announced the torpedoing of the Lusitania. Two days later, he sent a telegram to the President which the latter read to the Cabinet. In part, the telegram read:

It is now certain that a large number of American lives were lost when the Lusitania was sunk.

I believe an immediate demand should be made upon Germany for assurance that this shall not occur again. If she fails to give such assurance, I should inform her that our Government expected to take such measures as were necessary to ensure the safety of American citizens.¹

That statement makes an illation between the sinking of a British ship with American citizens aboard and the duty of our government to protect those American citizens. On the strength of that conclusion, House maintained that America could not remain neutral but that she should enter the conflict because "we are being weighed in the balance, and our position amongst nations is being assessed by mankind."²

By-passing the sentiment which put our national honor at stake, we should consider the background and basis for the aforementioned illation.

¹ Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 433-434. See Tansill, America Goes to War, 266-289, for a comprehensive study of the sinking.

² Ibid., 434.

Bryan was one of the foremost opponents of protection to an American aboard a belligerent's ship.³ On April 2, 1915 Bryan wrote to the President:

The American who takes passage upon a British vessel knowing that this method of warfare will be employed (submarine attack), stands in a different position from that occupied by one who suffers without any fault of his own. . . . It seems to me that the doctrine of contributory negligence has some bearing on the case.⁴

Lansing⁵ and Page⁶ were just as strong for the rights of Americans sailing on any belligerent's vessel and both assigned as their reason the dignity of America. A later study of the problem brought this conclusion to light:

it is disastrous when he (Wilson) failed to realize that there was no precedent or legal warrant for a neutral to protect a belligerent ship from attack by its enemy because it happened to have on board American citizens.⁷

It would seem that House's reasoning was at fault but, at fault or no, it was that type of thinking that made him a true advocate of intervention.

Apart from Colonel House, the sinking of the Lusitania created a tremendous stir. Tumulty reports that the President for the first time veered from the neutral position he had taken when he received an outspoken pro-intervention letter from Page. The President declared:

3 Baker and Dodd, The New Democracy, 291.

4 Peterson, Propaganda For War, 128. On the same point Bryan again wrote to Wilson, "Are the rights and obligations of citizenship so one-sided that the Government which represents all the people must bring the whole population into difficulty because a citizen instead of regarding his country's interests, thinks only of himself and his interests." The Lansing Papers, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1939, 372.

5 Lansing Papers, 365

6 Hendrick, Life and Letters of Page, II, 26.

7 Borchard and Lage, Neutrality, 136

He (Page) was right. England is fighting our fight and you may well understand that I shall not, in the present state of the world's affairs, place obstacles in her way. . . . No matter what may happen to me personally in the next election, I will not take any action to embarrass England when she is fighting for her life and the life of the world. Let those who clamour for radical action against England understand this.⁸

Baker reports Tumulty's citation of the President's words with a note of misgiving, "If this statement is authentically reported, the President's fundamental conception of the war must have altered since the submarine warfare began to affect Americans."⁹ A German newspaper explained the sinking in another way.

But must we not, we whose throat the enemy is seeking to cut, we whose defeat by hunger and by lack of war material nearly every one would witness complacently as an unavoidable fate, must we not defend ourselves from this dreadful danger, which still threatens us, with all our might and with all the means that the German people can invent and which the honor of the German people recognizes as legitimate weapons?¹⁰

Borchard and Lage called attention to a plan followed in the Boer War which avoided unnecessary loss of neutral lives by allowing a number of passenger ships could enter certain ports provided they carried no contraband.¹¹

Perhaps the most damaging critique of the American position was penned by these same authors.

8 Tumulty, Woodrow Wilson, 231.

9 Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 328.

10 Charles E. Lauriat, The Lusitania's Last Voyage, Boston, 1915, 105. A quotation from Frankfurter Zeitung, May 9, 1915.

11 Borchard and Lage, Neutrality, 196.

The American officials did not stop long to inquire or note whether the Lusitania was armed, whether she carried munitions, what orders the captain had had, whether the Americans on board had assumed any risks, how the ship had been handled; nor were they concerned with the fact that it was a British ship they were seeking to defend from the activity of its enemy.¹²

In London, Colonel House had a long talk with Lord Kitchener on May 12 in which Kitchener discussed the great value of American intervention. In his appraisal of Kitchener's words, House said, While it was the clever way to talk to me, he did not do it for that reason (intervention of the United States), for how could he know what would or would not influence me."¹³ Kitchener probably did not desire to influence House because his position on intervention was made clear by his first note to the President.

In Philadelphia, the President gave what has been called his "Too Proud to Fight" speech. House recorded that the speech was received with great distress by "Page and all of us."¹⁴ Although a previous statement in a private conversation with Tumulty seemed to indicate a different frame of mind,¹⁵ the President felt that if he intervened, the United States would lose all possibility of creating a stable world system.¹⁶ As yet, then, he was not ready to listen to the importunities of Colonel House. On May 13, Wilson sent the first Lusitania note to Berlin including the words "strict

12 Ibid., 141, 142.

13 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 437.

14 Ibid., 438.

15 Supra, 56

16 Millis, Road to War, 179.

accountability" of note on February 10, 1915. Berlin's reactions to the meaning of the note were caustic. "It embodied the view that the rights of Americans to trade and travel in European waters, war zone or no war zone, could not be abridged. When von Jagow read this, he laughed and said, 'Why not the right of free travel on land in war territory?'"¹⁷ General expressions of ready acceptance were given in London by Page, Balfour and House.¹⁸ In the United States Bryan tried to make one last attempt to keep American citizens off belligerent ships. He had Lansing prepare a notice to that effect, and he wrote to the President suggesting that "it weakens the effect of our saying to Germany that we mean to support our citizens in the exercise of their rights to travel both on our ships and on belligerent."¹⁹ This sane reasoning was never accepted because the President felt that it would indicate a shortcoming in the American policy. And so, we were in an anomalous position because

by refusing to lift a warning voice against the daily increasing risk, the administration was encouraging American citizens to travel on such ships - even, in effect, encouraging the British to hire Americans in their crews. And to all intents and purposes, the administration guaranteed to protect these citizens, apparently oblivious of the fact, notwithstanding Wilson's admission to Bryan, that its legal position was unsustainable.²⁰

17 Peterson, Propaganda For War, 127

18 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 440.

19 William J. and Mary Baird Bryan, The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan, Chicago, 1925, 403.

20 Borchard and Lage, Neutrality, 162.

It was this impasse which was eventually to lead to Bryan's resignation.

We have not referred to British propaganda or its effects on Colonel House while considering the sinking of the Lusitania because the connection between the propaganda and House is established in the concrete as each episode unfolds. When the torpedoing was announced, House adopted the British point of view at once. His ignorance of the legal aspects of the sinking, his distress when the President did not react more forcibly in his "Too Proud to Fight" speech, and his discussion of American intervention with Kitchener, all prove that British propaganda had done its work well. House's identification of his cause with Britain's is only made more complete by his handling of the situation created by Britain's holding-up of American ships in British ports. Here again he proved to be strongly pro-British, even to the point of neglecting American rights in favor of the necessity of Britain to stop supplies from getting to Germany.

On May 15 House brought up the dispute with England about the holding-up of American cargoes. During the first year of the war the British were hailing many American merchantmen into British ports to inspect them for contraband. The delays resulting caused great losses to American ship owners because of spoiled cargoes and additional wages to sailors due to month long layovers in port. Since the holding-up of ships tied in directly with the British blockade, House hoped to be able to lift the blockade of American vessels. Instead of insisting on American rights to free seas in keeping with her position as a neutral, he asked the British if they would lift the blockade on condition that he could get the Germans to give up the use of the submarine. That last condition made the plan impossible of attainment.

House's suggestion was quickly taken up by the President, who told House in a cablegram that:

it will presently become necessary, for the sake of diplomatic consistency and to satisfy our public, to address a note to Great Britain about the unnecessary and unwarranted interruption of our legitimate trade with neutral ports." He thought it would be a brilliant stroke on England's part for her to "relieve this situation, and so put Germany wholly in the wrong. . . . It would be a small price to pay for cessation of submarine outrages.

Borchard and Lage commenting on the words of the President pointed out that

this hardly sounds like a "champion" of neutrality. For the sake of "diplomatic consistency and to satisfy our public," he suggests that a protest will become necessary which, if heeded, would "put Germany wholly in the wrong." He must have felt that if Britain did not yield, Germany was not "wholly in the wrong."²¹

House certainly did not interpret the President's message in that way but took immediate action on receipt of the message. On May 20 he wrote to the President that he and Grey had met and drawn up a plan which was predicated on Germany's withdrawal of the submarine as an instrument of war. Grey attached a rider to that proviso, namely, the discontinuance of asphyxiating or poisonous gases. It is well to note that while Grey was drawing up this plan, he was doing so with the knowledge that it could not be considered because the English cabinet was dissolved, and therefore Grey could only speak for himself. The agreement reached by the two men read in part as follows:

²¹ Borchard and Lage, Neutrality, 147. The President's cablegram is taken from Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 345.

He(Grey) dictated, while I wrote, the understanding between us, which was literally this: 1st. Permitting staple foodstuffs to go to neutral ports without question. 2nd. All foodstuffs now detained to be brought before prize courts as soon as possible. 3rd. Claims for cotton cargoes now detained to be made as soon as shippers certify as to each cargo that they are the real owners to whom payment should be made etc.

Should England agree to the first proposition, Germany was to cease submarine warfare on merchant vessels and discontinue the use of asphyxiating or poisonous gases.²²

Prescinding for a moment from the fact that House apparently allowed Grey to draw up a set of propositions which House was going to submit to another government in behalf of the United States, we will examine this list of terms. Germany apparently refused to consider the list according to Seymour although there is not a categorical refusal listed in the Intimate Papers. Two messages from Ambassador Gerard are said to be the source of the report that the House-Grey efforts had failed, and these two letters are set down as the causes for the refusal.²³

A segment of the first letter is included in a telegram from House to the President.

Gerard cabled me as follows: 'Zimmermann told me yesterday that Dumba, Austrian Ambassador, had cabled him that Bryan told him that America was not in earnest about Lusitania matter.' Of course Mr. Bryan did not say that, but I think you should know what Zimmermann told Gerard.²⁴

This is one reason offered for German refusal to consider the compromise. Even if Bryan did say what Dumba reported him to have said (we have not been able to find such a message), we can be sure that the President's first

22 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 447. Underscoring my own.

23 Ibid., 451.

24 Ibid.

Lusitania note convinced the Germans that the United States was in earnest.

In the second message relayed by telegram to the President, House gave von Jagow's reply to the House-Grey terms. Von Jagow added a further condition, "If raw materials are added, the matter perhaps can be arranged."²⁵ This effectively killed all possibility of the compromise for, as House explained, the Allies would never consent to such an agreement. The stand of the Allies is completely understandable but perhaps here, too, the distinction between contraband and non-contraband might have been applied if the Declaration of London were in force. This is just another example of how House's early retreats made future diplomatic victories impossible.

Further analysis of the stipulations of the House-Grey plan shows that the agreement of Germany was to be sought, "should England agree to the first proposition."²⁶ No such agreement had been reached. Here again we have an instance of poor diplomacy on House's part, because the plan should have been presented to both governments officially and simultaneously if it was to have any chance for success. Secondly, in effect, House was asking Germany to give up her most potent weapon, the submarine, without any official assurance that Britain would lift her blockade. It was not to be expected that Germany would act on the flimsy promise of future British action.

This final failure to start peace negotiations led the Colonel to say:

25 Ibid., 452

26 Supra, 60

I have concluded that war with Germany is inevitable (he wrote on May 30) and this afternoon at six o'clock I decided to go home on the S.S. St. Paul on Saturday. I sent a cable to the President to this effect.

I discussed the matter with Wallace, who will go with us, and I also discussed it with Page, who advised our going if we cared to get home within the year. Page is always a candid adviser. . . . June 1, 1915: I told Plunkett I was leaving for America and my reasons for doing so. I said it was my purpose to persuade the President not to conduct a milk-and-water war, but to put all the strength, all the virility, and all the energy of our nation into it, so that Europe might remember for a century what it meant to provoke a peaceful nation into war.

I intended to suggest a commission, with perhaps a member of the cabinet as chairman, to facilitate the manufacture of munitions of war and war materials.²⁷

Colonel House's final conclusion represented a further leap in his analysis of our diplomatic mission in the troubled European crisis. Although his dream of negotiating a peace was shattered, it should not have come as a shock to him because during the entire time of his "Great Adventures", he had not had one solid piece of evidence that he and the Allies, with whom he conducted most of his negotiations, were of the same mind. His contacts with Germany were at best friendly discussions from which he emerged satisfied that he had established good feeling between the United States and Germany. A more disinterested approach to both sides might have made him one of the most famous figures in history.

His last few days in England before his return to the United States followed much the same pattern - a round of visits to various celebrities.

27 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 453-454.

The perplexing problem of the holding-up of American cargoes and mails consumed most of his time. He was still anxious that

President Wilson would comprehend the difficulties which Sir Edward Grey faced, how hard he was pressed by British opinion and the Admiralty and how important it was for the U.S. to remain on friendly terms with the Allies. Whatever the irritation caused by the restriction of American trade, House never wavered in his conviction that our welfare was bound up in German defeat.²⁸

Seymour's evaluation of House's position as quoted above suggests that American rights should yield to British necessity even though our position was legally sound. Perhaps House did not see the difficulty involved in his way of thinking as his biographer did,

Furthermore, it was impossible for the President to protest with vigor against German infractions of the law of nations, so long as the Germans had some ground for complaint that he permitted the British to alter maritime regulations at will.²⁹

If that argument had been exploited by House it might perhaps have proven a worthwhile fulcrum to force concessions from the British.

On June 4, the day before he sailed for America, House had an audience with the King, during which he read the last two messages sent to the President explaining that he wished all official England to know precisely the United States Government's position on the delaying of American ships. The following day he left for the United States aboard the St. Paul and arrived home a week later.

28 Ibid., 456.

29 Ibid., 457.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

To weigh adequately Colonel House's importance during the year in which he travelled to Europe for his two 'Great Adventures,' we must first consider how he fitted into the larger picture of World War I history. Early in the war, our legal rights were abridged by the British. In trying to settle the problems raised by British infringements through the ordinary legal channels, we were balked by British opposition and questionable American foreign policy as stated by Wilson and followed out by his representatives. Both of these elements have been treated in this consideration. However, other factors helped to dictate America's eventual policy.

Although the American people regarded the war with horror when it started, they were closely linked to France and England by tradition, treaty and trade. Deeper bonds of culture and language held them especially fast to England. As the war progressed more and more cargo ships sailed for English and French ports laden with food, raw materials and munitions. A new prosperity gripped America. When a ship left an American harbor, bound for one of the Allies' supply depots, it meant that we were so much the more tied up with the Allies victory. Therefore, the economic pressure in America made American business men pro-Ally from the beginning, and made it more difficult for the President to use the embargo as a talking point against the Allies, for it would mean the cessation, or at least a lessening of the new-found prosperity. Huge loans of money were floated by the English and French,

and thus the banking class became proponents of an Allied victory.

All of these factors, tradition, language, trade in raw materials and financial loans lessened the President's chances of concluding a successful peace treaty. Granted that this was the situation, nevertheless the President decided at the outset that the American foreign policy was to be geared to strict neutrality, and to strive to be the instrument of bringing peace. He outlined that position early in the war and reiterated it when occasion arose. We have tried to show that the President failed in his endeavors for neutrality and peace because Colonel House was victimized by British propaganda.

How then, in summary fashion, did the British Propaganda bring House to a conviction that American intervention should come on the side of the Allies? General propaganda procedure was applied to House as it was to 260,000 other influential Americans.¹ He was the recipient of books and pamphlets, and he read the newspaper accounts of the war which came from the British controlled press in London. This general propaganda, however, played a minor role. A more particular phase of propaganda was applied in House's case. He was received with open arms into the most intimate diplomatic gatherings in London. His days in the British capital were filled with conversations, discussions, and meetings with the most important members of the British diplomatic corps. On each of his trips to London, visits with the King were arranged. In no instance was his request for an interview with

1 For the technique governing propaganda for the general public, see Peterson, Propaganda for War, 37. For the extensiveness of general propaganda, see "The United States and the War," Harpers Monthly, March 1918, Vol. 136, 521-531, an article by Sir Gilbert Parker.

a higher dignitary refused. On this side of the ocean, the same treatment was accorded him. In addition, the Colonel kept up a wide and varied correspondence and his letters never went unanswered. Both in the letters and during the interviews, topics of the highest importance were considered. Plans were evolved and discarded. An air of secrecy pervaded most of the Colonel's dealings with the British. All this special treatment showed the value which the British placed on him as personal representative of the President. It was on the occasion of these talks, or by means of the correspondence, that the British tried to influence House's ideas and his approach to a solution of problems facing the United States and the Allies.

What ideas did the British propagandists have to keep in mind during the course of meetings attended by Colonel House? Certain general principles governed their efforts during the first year of the war. Essential for successful propaganda is the existence of a cordial relationship among war time allies to maintain a solid front against the enemy.² Colonel House fostered this spirit of cordiality because his object was to make friends. To control neutral attitudes, it was necessary "to lead the neutral to identify your enemy as his enemy and your aims as his aims."³ House fell in line with this aspect of propaganda because of his successful indoctrination by Grey, among others. The American people were fed large doses of stories about

2 Lasswell, Propaganda Technique, 114.

3 Ibid., 126.

German atrocities in Belgium,⁴ and legends about German tyranny.⁵ "One of the most subtle and effective forms of indirect propaganda is the encouragement of everything which draws the neutral into some form of de facto co-operation with the Belligerent."⁶ In furthering this particular phase of propaganda, the British found Colonel House a most willing helper, for he cooperated in drawing up an important peace plan with Grey as an aide, in recasting a State Department note with Spring-Rice, in delaying a peace conference when a note came from Zimmermann inviting him to Berlin because Grey advised him to do so,⁷ and, in general, by approving general British policies which were designed to draw us to the side of the Allies.⁸ House, too, was in agreement with the vilification campaign directed against Germany.

House's relationships with members of the American government, especially with Bryan and Wilson, lessened his effectiveness as a peace envoy not a little. Bryan's position during the first year of the war was an unenviable one. He was almost totally forgotten as a possible mediator despite his past record as treaty-maker. Colonel House must be called to

4 Will Irwin, Propaganda and the News, New York, 1936, 140.

5 Millis, Road to War, 39.

6 Lasswell, Propaganda Technique, 137.

7 Millis, Road to War, 140

8 Ibid., 224.

account for his lack of contact with Bryan, even though he might have felt that his office of personal representative of the President precluded the necessity of relying on Bryan's and the State Department's knowledge of possible data which would be helpful in the formation of peace plans. The Colonel suggested that Bryan be left out of any peace overtures because he is regarded by the Allies as "visionary."⁹ The reason for this Allied disdain might possibly be found in statements such as the one made early in the war. The letter was written by Sir Cecil Spring-Rice to a fellow Englishman, Sir Arthur Nicholson late in November, 1914.

Bryan spoke to me about peace as he always does. He sighs for the Nobel Prize, and besides that he is really a convinced peaceman. . . . No one doubts his sincerity but that is rather embarrassing for us at the present moment, because he is always at us with peace propositions. This time he said he could not understand why we could not say what we were fighting for.¹⁰

Baker's estimation of Bryan differed radically from that of House and the Allies. Commenting on the general diplomatic situation at the beginning of December, 1914, he noted that

One of the surprising features of these developments is the way in which Bryan looms up as the statesman of largest calibre among Wilson's advisers. His views were not only the broadest and the most constructive, but most in accord with the President's own conception of America's role in the world. We find Bryan suggesting many of the things that Wilson was to say and do after two years of futile negotiations by House.¹¹

9 Seymour, Intimate Papers, I, 279.

10 Gwynn, Letters and Friendships of Spring-Rice, II, 240.

11 Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 300, 301.

However, the President saw fit to follow few of Bryan's suggestions at the time, and further disagreements at a later date led finally to Bryan's resignation. Our study of this period has led us to believe that Bryan would have been more capable as the personal representative of the President because he had greater diplomatic experience in dealing with the vagaries of foreign diplomats.

The friendship between House and the President was an enigmatic one. Their conversations on diplomatic problems in which the United States was deeply involved were marked by a vagueness and generality of subject matter which did not speak well of conferences between a President and his personal diplomatic representative. We noted, too, a pronounced tendency of the President's biographer, Baker, to use Colonel House as a whipping-boy for presidential failings. Colonel House did not make the general policies of the United States, nor did he dictate the final decisions, although he had an important bearing on the outcome of many of them. It was the President's decisions in 1914-1915 which put American battalions on the soil of France in 1917.

The more one studies the course of President Wilson during the period of neutrality the clearer become the fateful consequences that hung upon his decisions. As a matter of fact, the war was decided not so much by American battalions on the French front in 1918 as by the President's decisions during the period of neutrality in 1914 and 1915, which involved the disposition of indispensable supplies of American goods and money.¹²

12 Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 197.

For this reason, Colonel House cannot be accused of directly bringing America into the war although he had a part in the destruction of the neutrality program when he reconstructed a State Department note.

House's place in foreign policy for 1914-1915 has already been dealt with. A closer consideration of Wilson's acts will show that greater culpability was his.¹³ With the outbreak of the war, Wilson had two methods of enforcing neutrality, war and economic pressure. The first was ruled out immediately because of isolationist tendencies of the people. He did not threaten economic pressure until the summer of 1915.¹⁴ Although trade and tradition bound us to the Allies, our legal position was founded on international law. Strict impartiality was the lot of the neutral if he wished to follow the principles of neutrality,¹⁵ but we did not maintain strict impartiality. A list of Wilson's failures in that regard, some of which go beyond the time considered in this thesis, are noted by Peterson.

Many Americans wished an embargo on munitions; Wilson objected; Bryan prohibited loans to warring nations; Wilson lifted the ban. Bryan asked for permission to warn Americans from traveling on foreign ships; Wilson refused. Congress tried to pass a bill preventing Americans from traveling on armed ships of belligerents; Wilson personally defeated the measure. The President's partisanship was so apparent that even the British stated: 'During the period while America was neutral all the issues in dispute between England and America were decided as England wished.'¹⁶

Therefore we must conclude that the President, not Colonel House, charted

13 For a general conspectus of Wilson's foreign policy, see Charles Seymour, American Neutrality, (1914-1917), New Haven, 1935, 2, 3, 14, 15.

14 Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 181.

15 Borchard and Lage, Neutrality, 6, 7.

16 Peterson, Propaganda for War, 328.

the true course of American neutrality. With these concessions to England, the President lost the possibility of realizing his cherished dream of peacemaker.

So far as concerns President Wilson's laudable desire to become an instrument of mediation in the European conflict, that also was much weakened by the fact that his deference to Great Britain took from the British all fear of his intent to exercise the power to resist their own impositions, thus depriving him of all genuine influence except as an ally.¹⁷

The true evaluation of this strange and hazy relationship between House and Wilson should be made after a close inspection of the responsibilities of each. Then we should conclude as Baker did when criticizing the results of House's first "Great Adventure," "On Wilson's part it seemed always to have been a relationship of faith without complete understanding, of trust without actual commitment - wholly creditable to neither, and deplorable in some of its results."¹⁸

Our consideration of Colonel House has been critical in nature. We do not mean to convey the impression that the object in his mission was not the lofty one of peace in Europe, but rather that his methods fell far below the object he was striving for. Unfortunately, he was diverted from his purpose by the skillful application of British propaganda. Criticism can be directed at him because like other American leaders he failed to see

17 Borchard and Lage, Neutrality, 79.

18 Baker, Woodrow Wilson, V, 50. See also Edwin M. Borchard, "Dragging America Into the War," Current History, Vol. 40, July, 1934, 392-401.

that "the propaganda arguments were largely irrelevant and that the causes for Europe's troubles were not given in these arguments."¹⁹

Was Colonel House a direct cause for American failure to bring about peace or maintain neutrality? The answer cannot be categorical. Colonel House had the same relation to a possible peace treaty and neutrality as propaganda did in effecting the final intervention of America in World War I. "It (propaganda) was not the cause for American entrance into the World War. But that it was a cause, and a powerful one, it seems impossible for the historian today to deny."²⁰

¹⁹ Peterson, Propaganda For War, 327. For an estimation of the overall effectiveness of British propaganda, see the same author, 317.

²⁰ Squires, British Propaganda, 81.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Mr. James R. Carney, S.J., has been read and approved by three members of the Department of History.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Nov. 4, 1954
Date

Charles H. Metzger, S.J.
Signature of Adviser